Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (currently amended) A method for detecting the status of printers on a network, said method comprising the acts of:

receiving ~~sending~~ a ~~signal~~ print task from a print driver at ~~to~~ a ~~client~~ local print processor; and

detecting, in response to said receiving, the status of a printer on a network from said local print processor to determine the availability of said printer through a direct communication between said local print processor and said printer, wherein said communication does not access a remote computer.

2. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said local print processor is an integral part of an operating system. ~~signal is a print task.~~

3. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein said detecting comprises obtaining network print queue information.

4. (currently amended) The method of claim 1 wherein said detecting comprises bi-directional communication between ~~a~~ said local print processor, a port manager and a printing device.

5. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein said detecting comprises accessing data from a Management Information Base (MIB).

6. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein said detecting comprises communication with a printing device using a protocol selected from the group consisting of Simple Network Management Protocol (SNMP), Remote Management (RMON) and Internet Printing Protocol (IPP).

7. (original) The method of claim 1 wherein said detecting comprises the use of an Application Program Interface (API) call.

8. (currently amended) A method of improving the probability of successful print task completion using a status-detecting print processor, said method comprising:

receiving ~~sending~~ a print task from a print driver at ~~to~~ a ~~client~~ local, status-detecting print processor;

detecting, in response to said receiving, through a direct communication between said local, status- detecting print processor and at least one printing device, the status of said at least one printing device; and

directing said print task to an available printing device among said at least one printing device.

9. (previously amended) The method of claim 8 wherein said status of said at least one printing device is presented to a user for selection of one or more available devices and said directing directs said print task to a device selected by said user.

10. (original) The method of claim 8 wherein a default printing device is selected by a user prior to said detecting and said directing directs said print task to said default device when said default device is available.

11. (currently amended) The method of claim 8 wherein said local, status-detecting print processor may also modify ~~a~~ said print task to enable cluster printing functions.

12. (original) The method of claim 11 wherein said modifying said cluster printing functions comprise job splitting.

13. (original) The method of claim 11 wherein said modifying said cluster printing functions comprise copy splitting.

14. (original) The method of claim 11 wherein said detecting determines a number of available printing devices and said modifying divides said initial print task into a number of modified print tasks equal to said number of available printing devices.

15. (currently amended) A method for improving printing system capability and performance without addition of hardware or modification of application software, said method comprising:

removing a non-status-detecting ~~client~~ local print processor (NPP) from a printing system; and

replacing said NPP with a status-detecting ~~client~~ local print processor (SDPP), wherein said SDPP can detect the status of a printing device by direct communication with said printing device.

16. (original) The method of claim 15 wherein said SDPP is also cluster enabling.

17. (currently amended) A computer readable medium comprising instructions for performing functions within a ~~client~~ local print processor, said instructions comprising the acts of:

interpreting local print task data; and

detecting the status of a printing device using a direct communication with said printing device without receiving printer information from a remote computer.

18. (original) The computer readable medium of claim 17 further comprising instructions for the act of redirecting a print task from its original destination to at least one other destination.

19. (cancelled)

20. (currently amended) A ~~client~~ local print processor comprising:

instructions for interpreting local print task data; and

instructions for detecting the status of a printing device using a direct communication with said printing device that without receiving printer information from a remote computer.

21. (currently amended) A method of printing using a status detecting local print processor, said method comprising:

receiving a preferred printer group selection;

modifying a print task to enable cluster printing thereby creating a plurality of modified print tasks;

detecting, from said local print processor, the status of a plurality of printing devices comprising said preferred printer group through direct communication between said local print processor and said printing devices without receiving printer information from a remote computer;

directing said modified print tasks to said preferred printer group when all of the printers within said preferred printer group are available; and

forming a second group of printers comprising the available printers within said preferred group and other available printers and sending said modified tasks to said second group when said second group comprises a sufficient number of printers to print said modified print tasks.

22. (original) The method of claim 21 further comprising selecting a group of backup printers from which said other available printers may be chosen.

23. (original) The method of claim 21 further comprising reconfiguring said modified print tasks to require fewer printers when a sufficient number of available printers cannot be found.

24. (original) The method of claim 21 further comprising forming a third group of printers comprising any available printers from said preferred group, any other available printers and any busy printers and directing said modified print tasks to said third group.

25. (original) The method of claim 21 further comprising entering a wait period when a sufficient number of printers are not available and rechecking for available printers after said wait period.

26. (original) The method of claim 21 further comprising activating a user prompt to solicit user input.